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Abstract

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THE ACTIVE PROGRAM – AN INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP ENHANCING HEALTH CARE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMERS

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Introduction: The National Mental Health Commission identifies the physical health of those living with a mental illness as worse than the general community on just about every measure. The ACTive Program is a partnership between the Shellharbour Mental Health Rehabilitation Unit (MHRU) and the University of Wollongong (UOW), with the primary aim to implement an appropriate and sustainable healthy lifestyle program into the current MHRU recovery model of care. **Methods:** The pilot ACTive program ran for 18 weeks in 2013, delivered by an interdisciplinary team comprising MHRU staff, a locum dietitian, a contract exercise physiologist (EP), and EP students. Approval to evaluate the program was received through the Joint UOW/ISLHD Health and Medical Human Research Ethics Committee. Qualitative and quantitative data were collated throughout the program for consumers. Qualitative data was also collected pre and post program for MHRU staff and EP students. The results presented focus primarily on consumer outcomes. **Results:** Preliminary results show an overall group average weight loss of 1.1kg, which is clinically significant given the challenges associated with this population. This equates to 0.82% loss of original bodyweight, with individual results ranging from -4.7% to +3.5%. Preliminary data from exercise assessments show an average of 80-metres increase in 6-minute walk test results, which also equates to increasing walk speed by 0.8km/hr. On average, the group sit-to-stand (30 seconds) capacity increased by 2.6 repetitions. Feedback provided by all stakeholders identified a number of key challenges to the effectiveness and sustainability of this type of program, such as staff 'buy-in', interest and availability; managerial support; aligning organisational procedure and policies, and university needs with program requirements; and communication logistics. **Conclusion:** The 'ACTive' program, and its potential application into a wider range of mental health service provision environments, may provide opportunities to expand the scope for EP student placement and employment; enhance the engagement of mental health professionals with identified consumer physical health needs; contribute to the dearth in literature on physical health programs within mental health services; and, ultimately serve to improve overall consumer health outcomes.